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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

# Memorandum



## THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

(Information as of 1300 EDT)

20 Sept 1963

ARMY, JCS REVIEWS COMPLETED

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20 September 1963

THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

(Information as of 1300 EDT)

SUMMARY

Saigon has virtually returned to normal, and there has been little significant reporting from South Vietnam since our last report.

The government has released the senior South Vietnamese Buddhist after 29 days of detention and escorted him ceremoniously to a lesser Saigon pagoda serving as headquarters for the regime-sponsored reorganization of the Buddhist movement.

[redacted] claims his group has joined forces with [redacted] and plans, with assurances of some military support in Saigon, to mount a coup this weekend. We cannot discount the report, but the past record of these elements has not demonstrated the capability to launch or succeed with such a plan.

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General Harkins reports that Diem has finally agreed to go ahead with the recommended transfer of the Ninth Division from central Vietnam to the delta, a move which had been delayed by the crisis and the resultant martial law.

Viet Cong attacks, with major operations concentrated almost wholly in the delta, last week reached their highest level of the year. This is in part seasonal, but probably also reflects Viet Cong desire to exploit every possibility for impeding a return to normal.

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## I. GENERAL

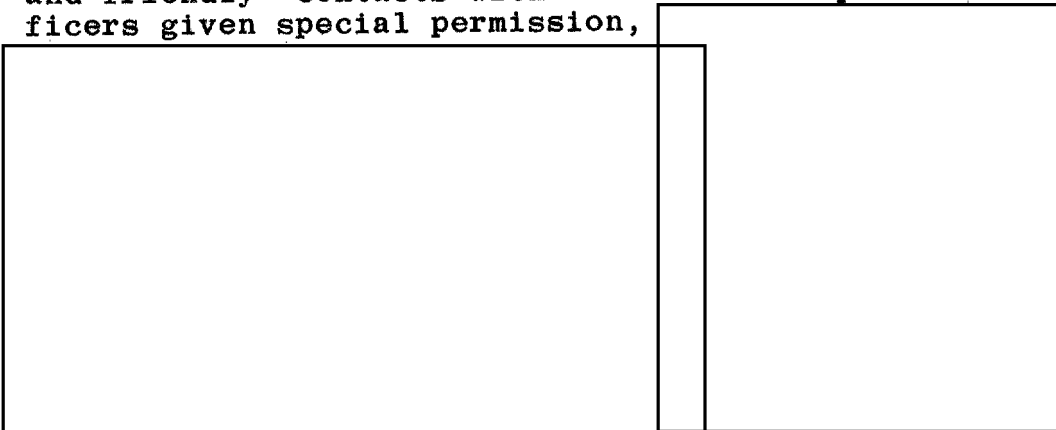
Almost all outward signs of the South Vietnamese crisis have disappeared from Saigon. Troop cordons formerly thrown around schools and such areas as the central market have been replaced by a few guards, and the schools have reopened.

## II. THE REGIME

1. The ranking and oldest Buddhist monk, 80-year-old Thich Thinh Kiet, has been released after 29 days of detention in a Saigon military hospital, and escorted to the An Quang pagoda. This pagoda now is the headquarters for the regime-sponsored Intersect Committee for the Defense of Pure Buddhism.

Buddhist nun Dieu Hue, the mother of scientist-diplomat Buu Hoi who heads the South Vietnamese UN observer delegation, was also released from the military hospital and taken to An Quang. She had threatened to take part in the Buddhist self-immolation campaign before martial law was proclaimed.

2. Officers of the Vietnamese Special Forces have been given verbal orders to restrict all "personal and friendly" contacts with Americans except for officers given special permission,



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#### IV. MILITARY SITUATION

1. General Harkins reports that President Diem has accepted his advice and is shifting the Ninth Division from central Vietnam (II Corps) to the delta region (IV Corps), with the move scheduled to begin 19 September.

This transfer had been in the works for some time in recognition of the greater need for troops in the Viet Cong-infested delta, but was delayed by martial law and the uncertain political situation of the past month.

General Harkins remains optimistic over the military progress being made in South Vietnam. He feels that the joint US-Vietnamese counterinsurgency program is moving steadily forward.

2. MACV reports that the number of Viet Cong attacks last week--137--was one-third higher than during the preceding week, reaching the highest point of the year to date. The total included two battalion- and 11 company-sized attacks, all but two of which were in the delta area.

MACV comments that the Communists apparently intend to use every available means to keep the population upset and hinder the government's efforts to settle its problems. We tend to concur, but note that in any event there usually is a seasonal increase in Viet Cong attacks in the fall.

#### V. OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

1. Madame Nhu flew from Belgrade to Athens today and plans to remain there overnight on her way to Rome. She told reporters at a US Embassy party in Belgrade last night that she planned to spend four or five days in Rome before continuing to Paris. We have also had reports that she plans to spend as much as two weeks in London, which would put off her arrival in the US to mid-October. She tentatively plans 14 lecture dates to "re-educate" Americans.

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